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ABSTRACT

The philosophy of the comprehensive community colleges, as well as their promises, has resulted in a revolution in higher education. The philosophy is that everyone should have access to higher education, at a price he can afford to pay, and that curricula should be geared to the real needs of persons. Most comprehensive community colleges offer programs designed to help persons enter the work world in two years or less. The emphasis is not on the degree but on the quality of preparation that will lead to successful employment and job satisfaction. Career education is the key concept. In addition to their campus programs, community colleges take educational programs into the community. This type of college education is extremely inexpensive. It still remains to be seen whether the promises of the comprehensive community colleges--universal education, a vital interest in the individual combined with individualized instruction, meeting the needs of the college faculty and staff, pursuing accountability in a humanistic manner, keeping career education from becoming simply job training, and providing leadership in the area of human development instruction--can be kept. (DB)

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The Comprehensive Community College - Promises to Keep

by

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The Comprehensive Community College - Promises to Keep

A quiet revolution has taken place within higher education during the past decade and it has occurred in unlikely places. A few years ago, while the national spotlight was focused on such places as Columbia, Burkeley, San Francisco, Kent State, another revolution was happening at places like Palos Hills, Illinois, Independence, Kansas, Gilman Hot Springs, California, Norwalk Connecticut, Sanford, Florida. The revolution to which I am referring is the development of the comprehensive community college.

It is a revolution in higher education because of its educational philosophy, that is, what education is all about, and for whom it is intended, and also because of the employment of a new methodology or delivery system.

The new philosophy (which of course is not new but which has been largely ignored by prestigious educational institutions in the past) states that everyone should have access to higher education and at a price he can afford to pay, that curricula should be geared to the real needs of persons and not designed by a faculty committee with some renaissance idea about what it means to be an educated man.

In most community colleges anyone may enroll for the curriculum of his choice. If the courses he needs are not offered he can, by getting together a group of like minded persons, persuade the college to find a qualified instructor and offer the course. If he does not have a high school diploma he may take an equivalency exam or take courses at the college to receive his diploma. If he did not do well in high school, the college offers refresher courses to sharpen his skills and insure success in his chosen course of study.

In many cases an older person with a great deal of "worldly knowledge" and experience can receive credit for his experiences and/or take appropriate exams to by-pass many courses of a preliminary nature and achieve advanced standing, thus maintaining a sense of self-worth in the knowledge that his years spent away from the college were not a total loss.

This philosophy of education is unique again in that it does not see a four year degree as the ultimate goal. Most comprehensive community colleges offer programs designed to help persons enter the work world in two years or less. The emphasis is not on the degree but on the quality of preparation which will lead to successful employment and job satisfaction. Career education is the key concept here.

What about the delivery system? Most community colleges do not have dormitories and students, therefore, must commute. This means no ivy-covered halls or panty raids. Greek organizations are non-existent, or if they do exist they do not play a major role in campus social and intellectual life nor do they provide a major source of student leadership. Intercollegiate athletics gives way in most instances to intramural programs. Many schools do not offer any substantial athletic program. Students drive to school, or take public transportation, park, go to class, visit the library when necessary, eat if there is time and space, and then go home or to their part-time job. For those who work full-time during the day most community colleges offer a complete academic program in the evening. Some have a totally different administrative staff for the evening division.

Community colleges take educational resources and opportunities into the community in addition to their campus offerings. Classes are conducted in churches, schools, prisons, apartment complexes, hospitals.

If there is a need, and the people cannot come to the college, the college makes every effort to go to the people.

College education is extremely inexpensive for those who live in the community. At my college the maximum tuition cost is $42.75 per quarter and some refresher or remedial courses are free of charge. When this is compared with traditional higher education, as most of us have known and experienced it, then I consider this a truly revolutionary development.

This is a quiet revolution because not many outside of those immediately involved know much about what has been happening. Even those who have been the beneficiaries of this service are quiet about it. They seem to have taken seriously Jesus' injunction to some of those he healed when he said to go and tell no one who healed them. But the gratitude and appreciation is there nonetheless. After having moved to Charlotte I identified myself to the barber upon my first visit to his shop. When he learned that I would be working at the college he volunteered, "Central Piedmont is the best thing that has ever happened to Charlotte".

The quiet revolution is gaining momentum. By 1980 the Carnegie Foundation Report predicts that 35 to 40 percent of all undergraduates will be attending the approximately 1300 community colleges across the nation.

The community college is a new institution with a great deal of promise. The question is, can the promises be kept? Every new trend within the community college raises important issues as well.

For example, when we open our doors to everyone we are saying in effect that it is possible for all to succeed. It may take some persons longer to master a discipline, but given enough time, nearly all can be successful.

This philosophy quite naturally lifts the hopes, aspirations and expectations of students.

This "given enough time" philosophy means we must take individual differences seriously and design courses and curricula so that they can be completed within varying time periods. This also may mean that partial credit may be given for segments which have been completed even though all the objectives of the course have not been met. It means that course s must be designed around specific objectives so that the student knows his status in a given course at all times.

But it is not enough to give a student a programmed text, cassette tape recorder, and tell him to bring in his work whenever he finishes the unit. Nor is it enough to abolish failing grades and allow a student to take a incomplete at the end of the grading period with the hope that he will make it up at some time in the future. These are cop-outs and evidence of the fact that it is difficult to keep our promises.

The open door policy with the attendant acknowledgement that persons come with varying degrees of ability and experiences demands a great deal of the community college. For one thing, it means more individual attention than we are often able or willing to give when so many are pressing to get in. But there are some who are attempting to keep the promise. One trend of note is the development of personalized educational programming utilizing cognitive style mapping. This emphasis on different cognitive styles was investigated by Dr. Joseph E. Hill, president of Oakland Community College, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. He is saying among other things that not only does learning <u>rate</u> differ from person to person, but so does learning <u>style</u>.

Some persons listen well, others like to read, still others can utilize multi-media effectively. Some function best on their own, others like the stimulation of the classroom. But this cognitive style mapping takes time and commitment by an educational institution. So, the trend toward universal education and open door policies becomes the issue of what to do with people after they are admitted. Or to put it another way, does the trend toward individualized instruction really ignore individual differences? Or to put it in still another way, does the open door in reality become a revolving door?

At the present time a great deal of attention is being focused on this problem under the banner called accountability. When 100 students enroll in a program in the fall and only a handful actually complete it, we are beginning to ask, why? Declining enrollments across the country coupled with the economic crunch has called for some belt-tightening.

Of course, accountability and efficiency are admirable goals, but sometimes their positive content gets lost in translation. There is low morale on many campuses today because instructors feel they must compromise their own personal and intellectual integrity to keep enrollments up and decrease the attrition rates. In many cases they are being asked to write packaged programs which may be reproduced and utilized for individualized instructional purposes. Many see this as a means of working themselves out of a job. Who will need him once he has committed all he knows to video tape?

Student Services are also suffering because of the need to economize. Many counseling departments have been eliminated because personal counseling is seen as a luxury.

The college cannot be faulted for not offering free psychotherapy, so this excuse is being given for the elimination of many counseling positions. Counselors must perform the utilitarian function of academic advising, registration, transcript evaluation. They are given such heavy student-counselor ratios that there is little time left to do personal counseling even if it is seen as a legitimate counseling function. And since the academic advising function does not require Master's degree preparation, counselors can be replaced by paraprofessionals at less cost to the college. So, morale among many counseling staffs and student services people is low also.

There are some significant bright spots, however. The emphasis on career education is one. Career education, rightly understood, is not simply providing access to a marketable skill, but is preparation for a meaningful life with the recognition that job satisfaction is a very important component. Career education involves helping persons understand their own skills, ambitions, motivations, value systems, and strengths, as well as the multitude of job possibilities available to them. In this way they are able to make career decisions that make sense to them. In the process of self-understanding they are also equipped with data which will help them when they are faced with other difficult decisions in the future.

The emphasis on career education, as over against training for a job, may keep the community college from becoming an educational supermarket that offers many packaged programs but very little counseling to help persons decide what they want or what they should buy.

Coupled with this emphasis on career education is a trend toward human development instruction. This trend is the one that excites me most. It is an attempt to take seriously the <u>person</u> who comes to the college seeking what he understands to be education.

It is an attempt to help him acknowledge and actualize his potential as a human being. This concern is in keeping with that humanistic philosophy of education which has been around for some time, and which one might expect to find in the more established, liberal arts oriented educational institutions across the land. So, to see this trend taking root and gaining momentum at the community college level may at first glance seem somewhat paradoxical. However, I think when we take a closer look we can see why this trend is a natural for the community college.

What is the community college student like? A majority of them fit into the category termed the "new student" by Dr. Andrew Goodrich, Director of Minority Group Programs for the American Association of Junior Colleges. He uses this term to replace others like "educationally disadvantaged", "culturally deprived", and other labels we have placed on those who don't fit the traditional molds or for whom the usual tests and measures do not apply. Many of these students come from homes where neither parent went to college, they have poor academic records in high school, and come to college because education has been advertised as a means to a better job and greater status in life than their parents have enjoyed. They do not come for any particular love of learning. In addition many suffer from a lack of self-esteem or self-worth when compared to standards of academic achievement or excellence.

Quite often when the new student comes to the community college, he is required to take refresher or remedial courses to upgrade his skills in order to pass successfully "college level" work. The tendency is to become discouraged quickly and drop out. When this happens we could wash our hands of him and say we tried, we have fulfilled our obligation to the tax payers of the state and the community. But many are not willing to stop here.

Those concerned with the whole person are creating courses and seminars aimed toward an increase in self-regard and self-actualization. Courses of this nature are springing up on community college campuses across the nation and are having a significant impact on curriculum planners and student services people. The counselor who is bored with academic advising is eager to use his skills in the classroom where the subject matter is the student himself and the objective is personal growth and development.

Where this kind of human development instruction is legitimized by the offer of academic credit, students are signing up and filling courses. The college can afford to allow this to happen because it generates instructional money and utilizes the expertise of counseling staff who are now being seen as human development facilitaters on many campuses and are also being allowed to share their insights concerning what education is and how it takes place with fellow faculty members.

I see this as an exciting trend and one with which the church may join hands and share. It also has tremendous implications for all of education. I predict that community colleges will provide the leadership and direction in this area in the years to come. It is my hope that the senior institutions will follow the lead by incorporating this philosophy of education into their own graduate and undergraduate programs especially in the areas of counselor and teacher education.

Maybe at this point I should simply summerize and bring this presentation to a close. I have tried to say that the comprehensive community college is a truly revolutionary phenomenon in the field of higher education today. It is a movement of tremendous promise offering an apportunity for education and personal growth to the entire community. It is a democratic institution of the highest order.

However, it still remains to be seen whether or not the promises can be kept. Can we keep the promise of universal education or must the open door be a revolving one? Can we combine a vital interest in the individual with our emphasis on individualized instruction? In our enthusiasm to meet the needs of the larger community can we remember that we have needs to be met within the college community itself, needs for faculty and staff to feel significant and important? Can we pursue accountability in a humanistic fashion? Can we keep the emphasis on career education from becoming simply job training for the less intellectually gifted or ambitious in our society? Will the community college firmly grasp the opportunity to offer leadership to the entire educational interprise in the area of human development instruction?

Like the travelor in Frost's poem, the comprehensive community college has a long way yet to go, cannot afford to sleep, has promises to keep, and splendid indeed are the promises.

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by
Dr. Roy Trueblood

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